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Looking forward

COMPILER'S COMMENTS

Looking forward. These words evoke broad reactions and varied feelings. In Acts 2, Peter quotes Joel, and says, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." In this issue, God's children are sharing their visions for the future.

As I worked on this issue, I have been focused on the present; the here and now of reality. The last few months have been a time of personal loss and transition. During this time, I have come down from the all-consuming high of planning the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference; I've lost a cousin and father-in-law both to unexpected and "way-too-young-to-die" deaths; and I've dealt with a number of other family issues and transitions. So, it's been easy to get bogged down in my present reality, and it's been easy to think that this rough patch will not end. Yet, the hope of life is that this too shall pass.

While the here and now is currently omnipresent for me, I am also of an age where I am constantly looking forward. I wish someone would tell me what I am going to do when I grow up. I just turned 27, and I am still unclear as to what I would like to pursue as a profession (I know there are many 40- and 50-years-old people that feel this way too!). With this in mind, I have asked my friend Tina Hartman to review a book that she has read that gives inspiration for the forward journey. See page 13 for this review.

Currently, I am one year into a two year contract with MCC U.S., though my love affair with MCC began long ago. Since childhood, I've held MCC on a pedestal. I romanticized the stories that MCC "missionaries" brought to our church. I was jealous of the push pins on the world map that denoted church members working



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We need to actively tap shoulders of women and men from diverse constituencies to ensure we get a broad range of people to apply for positions of leadership and administration.

with people of other cultures in far off exotic places. In college, I continued this romanticization, and I even wrote a 32 page paper (it only had to be 15–20 pages) about MCC for an International Organization class. The only criticism the professor had of the paper was that it was a bit one-sided, and that I did not have many sources or critiques of MCC for the things it does wrong. At the time, I was still convinced that there really wasn't much of substance to critique about MCC.

So, when I saw the job opening for Women's Concerns editor, I jumped on the chance to work at MCC. Here was an opportunity to combine my women's studies, cultural studies, writing background, and peace and justice interest with my love for MCC. I applied, and I was hired.

It didn't take long for me to realize that MCC has its problems and challenges like any other institution. MCC is not unique or unusual in this respect. The reality is that human organizations have very human problems. As I look forward, I wonder how Christians can work together to make better organizations? How can we reflect kingdom values in our work environments? One way is to work towards being anti-sexist and anti-racist, just as MCC has pledged to do. We have to ask questions like will our current structures

support new leadership? Do we use methods of recruitment that appeal to a broad range of people in the church? What do we need to do to welcome those who have not always been welcome in the past?

In the United States, females make up 51 percent of the population and people of color make up 31 percent of the population. In Canada, the numbers are 50.5 percent of the population is women and 13.5 percent of the population is people of color. Our church organizations and hierarchies need to mimic these numbers. We need to actively recruit young people within their churches. We should not only visit church colleges and expect to reach a broad spectrum of the church. We need to actively tap shoulders of women and men from diverse constituencies to ensure we get a broad range of people to apply for positions of leadership and administration. We need to work harder at finding answers to these questions, and to create structures that welcome people and encourage people to stay.

When looking forward, there are admittedly many other -isms we have to work on, but working to dismantle sexism and racism is a place to start. Since all oppression is so intricately intertwined and connected with power issues, our work against sexism and racism will necessarily lead us to work and speak out against other forms of oppression.

Luke 17:20–21 says "Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'" This text is telling us that the reality of God's kingdom is present and available. It is ours for the taking and the receiving. We can look forward to the kingdom present if we want to work on it. This is what I look forward to the church bringing forth by working against oppression.

In this issue of *Report*, almost all of the writers focus on challenging these oppressions. Kristin Reimer and Maricela Bejar Chávez are both workers with MCC that I asked to focus on what they see as the future for service, aid, development, and peace work. It is evident to me that both feel strongly about anti-racism and anti-

The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

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sexism since that is what they chose to focus on in their articles. Addie Banks' sermon at the Mennonite Church USA General Assembly gathering in Atlanta articulated a vision of the church that she hopes to see and that I hope comes to fruition. Gay Lynn Voth, Christine Aroney-Sine, and Kathleen Leadley all call for women and men to be given the opportunities to develop to their fullest potential. Each of the writers in this issue look to the future, hoping to find a church that gives the opportunity for freedom and fullness of voice to all of its members. These are not the visions for the future that I thought I would receive, but since I did receive them, I have even more hope as I look forward.

—compiled and edited by Patricia Haverstick

From the desk

- **New packet available.** Recently, MCC Women's Concerns has released a packet called "Making your sanctuary safe: Resources for developing congregational abuse prevention policies." This packet assists congregations in developing policies to prevent abuse. It focuses on the necessity of prevention programs. The cost is \$5 U.S./ \$7 Cdn. Please contact Beth Graybill, Women's Concerns Director, at 717-859-1151 or bgraybill@mccus.org for more information or to order this resource.
- **30th Anniversary Mug.** In 2003, we are celebrating 30 years of work by the MCC Women's Concerns Desks. A mug commemorating the 30th anniversary of Women's Concerns is available for purchase. There are a limited number available of these attractive, green and white mugs that feature an illustration by Teresa Pankratz. The mugs cost \$8 U.S. plus shipping. Please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org.

I have a dream

I have a dream! Don't we all have dreams? Visions and ideas we hope will be realized in the future? Some of our dreams remain unspoken, and often unrealized, because we believe it is unlikely that these "wild thoughts" could ever come to fruition.

I am faced with a dilemma as I write this short vision piece today. Do I dare to speak what I dream of? Must I name what I hope for so it can be realized in the future? These ideas remain "wild" in that they have not yet been "domesticated" with everyday use and common exposure, and so I fear being misunderstood as I begin to articulate what is hiding in my heart that is, as yet, just a dream.

I have a dream for the future of evangelical Christian education. I dream of a future when evangelical theology more dynamically and fully integrates the truth of the biblical text with the powerful resource of God's Holy Spirit. Let me explain. I believe that many within the evangelical community have a strong confidence in the biblical word of God and wonderful spiritual experiences through which the Spirit of God ministers to them, and they to others. These two often intersect to be mutually supportive of each other. Personal spiritual experiences are encouraged by the ideas drawn from the biblical texts while biblical interpretation is shaped by our experi-

ences. This is a working relationship that has already been realized.

What am I dreaming of, then, when I dream of a more dynamic and fuller integration of our understanding of the biblical text with God's Spirit? I am dreaming of a day when we are not restrained by traditional interpretations of the Bible when God wants to blow through our midst like a mighty wind. I dream of a day when God, as the eternal Creator, can be creative among us and within us making us into a people of love, respect and understanding

by Gay Lynn Voth

Gay Lynn Voth is a full-time teaching faculty in the area of theology and history at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, British Columbia. She is also a wife, mother of three married daughters and the grandmother of two one-year-olds.



Must I name what I hope for so it can be realized in the future?

Why not women?

This is excerpted from Why not women? A fresh look at scripture on women in missions, ministry, and leadership by Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000). Loren Cunningham is the founder of Youth With a Mission (YWAM), one of the world's largest mission societies. This book can be purchased at www.ywampublishing.com. Reprinted with permission.

I have a dream of a spiritual awakening sweeping the world through this emerging generation, the millennium generation. I see the Gospel finally being spread to every person in the world, with every nation and every people group disciplined with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

An old apostle, Simon Peter, also had this dream. He saw the beginning of its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). An old prophet, Joel, predicted that in the last days this dream would come true as sons and daughters would prophesy (Joel 2:28–29). An old king, David, had the same dream, saying that a great host of women would proclaim the Good News (Psalm 68:11b, as correctly translated by the NASB, which manages to reflect the Hebrew original most accurately) . . .

As I envision this, I see every little girl growing up knowing she is valued, knowing she is made in the image of God, and knowing that she can fulfill all the potential He has put within her. I see the Body of Christ recognizing leaders whom the Holy Spirit indicates, the ones whom He has gifted, anointed, and empowered without regard to race, color, or gender. This generation will be one that simply asks, "Who is it that God wants?" There will be total equality of opportunity, total equality of value, and a quickness to listen to and follow the ones the Holy Spirit sets apart.

This new generation will not be bound by traditions hindering women from obeying God's call the way my generation has. Instead, they will take a fresh look at the Word of God, knowing that the Holy Spirit will never do anything that contradicts His Word. As this emerging generation studies the Bible free of cultural blinders, they will see that the Lord has always used both women and men to proclaim the Good News and to prophesy the Word of God to their generation.

he concludes his gospel: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25). It is impossible to communicate all that has been revealed by God through the medium of words. Something is always left unwritten, "unnamed" and, therefore, "killed off" when words alone are used.

Second, the written text remains open to interpretation, and can therefore be manipulated and distorted. Interpretations of the Bible can force the text to say too much or not enough. Jesus, in his teaching about the Law, addresses this problem (Matthew 5). The Pharisees had carefully articulated the Jewish Law in words, such that Jesus notes: "You have *heard* that it was *said* to the people long ago." Jesus taught that the Pharisees' interpretations of traditional words and ideas were limiting and distorting the kind of righteousness God desired; "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Strong words meant to be taken seriously. A word from God can "kill" when we choose to interpret scripture as finite rules and regulations, ignoring the eternal heartbeat of God while doing so.

God's heart beats with love and provides freedom in the Spirit. The biblical texts are full of examples of God's unrestrained love for us and the liberty the Spirit brings. Jesus was the living Word of God, declaring God's love in no uncertain terms. Jesus is the living example of "the way, the truth, and the life" of love. God's love opens doors, clears the path of old debris, confronts the lies and deceit holding people captive, and offers freedom to all. Love fulfills the law of God more fully than any other commandment; for Jesus taught us: "Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37–40).

Living a life of love for God requires a life of love for others, even our enemies, and this is my dream for the future . . . Christian education within evangelical circles that will actively engage students to live a life of love as the only faithful interpretation and exercise of biblical truth. ♦

for each other. I dream of a day when education within the evangelical church can fully embrace both biblical teaching and the "wildness" of the unknown that is longing to be birthed by God within us and is yet unseen.

I want both, not one without the other. I value the revelation of God preserved within the written text of the Christian scriptures and, therefore, I agree with the apostle Paul when he teaches us that as Christians we are "ministers of a new covenant not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). What does Paul mean? How can the written text "kill?"

First, any text, including the written text of the Bible, restrains and confines ideas within the limits of what can be communicated with words. The writer of the gospel of John felt this "pinch" or restraint when he wrote down his recollections of Jesus' time on earth. He notes the following as

God's love opens doors, clears the path of old debris, confronts the lies and deceit holding people captive, and offers freedom to all.

Still struggling

by Christine Aroney-Sine

Christine Aroney-Sine, M.D., is an Australian physician who developed and directed the healthcare ministry for YWAM's Mercy Ships. She now lives in Seattle with her husband, Tom Sine. She and Tom work together assisting churches and Christian organizations to engage the challenges of the 21st century; they have consulted with MCC in the past on this topic and others. Christine's work includes international healthcare, travel medicine, preparing people for overseas mission service, and advocating for change to our timeliness and lifestyles to develop a more spiritual rhythm for our lives. Christine has a new book coming out in Fall 2003 called *Sacred Rhythms: Finding Peace in a Hectic World*.

I was scared to look at what the Bible said about women because I was afraid this would only confirm my worst fears.

The church's challenge for the 20th century was the equality of women," proclaimed the speaker at a conference I attended recently. "Now that this battle has been won, we need to move on to new issues facing the church in the 21st century." I was stunned as I thought of my many women friends around the world who still struggle to find acceptance and to feel valued within their churches. This statement has revolved in my mind ever since. What have women gained in the last few decades and, as we look to the future, what are they still seeking?

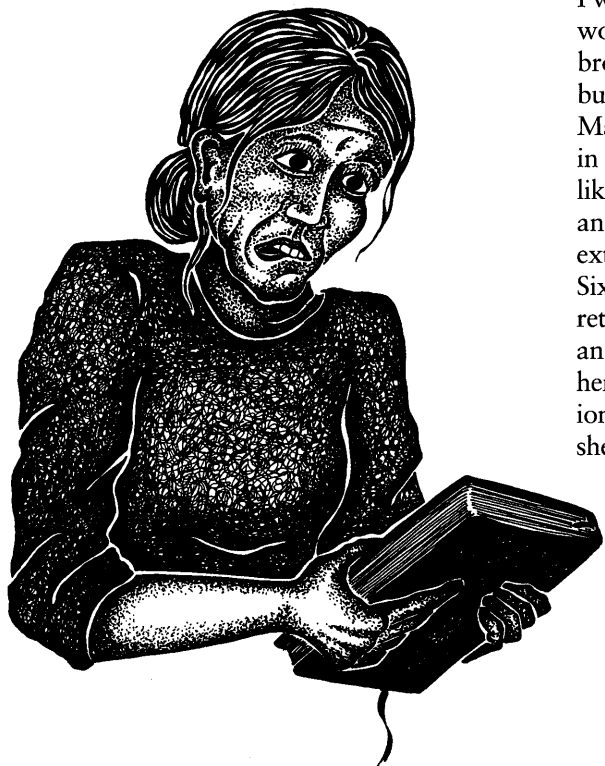
Personally I have benefitted tremendously from the battles that women have fought in the past. Physical abuse was a constant part of my growing up experience in Australia. My Greek father believed that as head of the family he had the authority to treat my mother, my brothers and myself however he wanted to. My mother and I were always made to feel like second-class citizens, and it seemed to me that the church not only turned a blind eye but often even condoned his behavior. As a teenager, I was depressed, discouraged and filled with despair. Then at sixteen, I experienced a personal encounter with God that started me on a long and sometimes painful jour-

ney into faith that gradually brought transformation and healing into my life.

It wasn't always easy. After I graduated from medical school, I moved to New Zealand and established myself in general practice. Ironically, in this country that was one of the first in the world to give women the vote, I felt more discriminated against in the church than I ever had before. "It's wrong for a single woman to earn more than a married man," I was told. "God only calls women into ministry when men don't respond" was another oft-repeated statement. In spite of a very successful medical practice, I felt like a misfit. Not only didn't society approve of who I was, but God didn't seem to either. I was scared to look at what the Bible said about women because I was afraid this would only confirm my worst fears.

I then joined the hospital ship Anastasis and it was as though a whole new world opened up for me. Building a hospital on board to perform cleft lip and palate and eye surgeries was an enriching and fulfilling experience. The unique privilege of my life has been the opportunity to use my medical skills in Africa, Asia, Central America, the Caribbean and the South Pacific to bring health and healing to thousands of people. I was particularly impacted by the young women with cleft lips whose disfigurement brought not only shame on their families, but also ostracism from their societies. Maria, for example, was a 15-year-old girl in Mexico who first came to us in a sack-like dress with dirty hair, a sullen face and downcast eyes. An ugly gaping hole extended from her upper lip to her nose. Six months following her surgery, Maria returned to the ship transformed. She wore an elegant dress with matching earrings and her hair was swept up into a new and fashionable style. A radiant smile lit her face as she informed us of her impending marriage.

The transformation of Maria and others like her transformed my life too. Encouraged by the affirmation of my friends and colleagues, I felt that God finally approved of me. "This is why God made me the way



Discovering that Jesus often went out of his way to draw to himself women who had been marginalized by both society and religious institutions brought a tremendous sense of liberation.

I am,” I realized. “I am not a misfit but a unique human being created in God’s image and specially equipped to perform the service that God has called me to do.”

Out of my new found confidence, I was able to begin a journey of spiritual and theological healing, too. Discovering that Jesus often went out of his way to draw to himself women who had been marginalized by both society and religious institutions brought a tremendous sense of liberation. The Samaritan woman drawing water when no one else was around, the woman with a discharge who would never have been allowed into the synagogue, another woman caught in adultery and threatened with stoning are all examples of the marginalized and abandoned women of Jesus’ day. Jesus not only treated women with respect and dignity, he also affirmed the equality of women in ways that were radical and revolutionary for his society.

Actually, God’s affirmation of the equality and freedom of women through Jewish spiritual practices goes back much further than Jesus’ day. I discovered this while researching Sabbath practices for a new book entitled *Sacred Rhythms: Finding a Peaceful Pace in a Hectic World*. The Sabbath celebration traditionally begins with the women presiding over the prayers of blessing for the family. Honoring women as well as men was always meant to be an important aspect of this celebration that formed the pivotal point for Jewish life.

So what is my hope for the future of women in the church? I can’t answer that question without thinking of the many women I know who still feel marginalized by the church. My friend Eydie is a young woman with two children who feels unwelcome when she walks into a church service with her kids. “There is no place in most churches for us to worship as a family,” she told me. “The kids are meant to be in one place and the adults in another.” Joan is a single woman who feels God has called her to preach and teach, but in the last few years her church has barred women from the pulpit. “Why does God give women gifts they can’t use?” she asked me. Lois is regularly abused by her husband who is a leader in their church. It seems to her that God and the church both approve of his treatment of her. I think also of Bu, a young Cambodian refugee who worked as a medical assistant with me in the refugee camps. “My hope for the future is that one day my daughters will have the same kind of freedom you do,” she told me.

That is my hope for the future too. I pray that one day women everywhere in our churches here in North America, and around the world, will be able to experience the same freedoms that I have discovered through my relationship with Christ—the freedom to be all that God has created them to be, without oppression, discrimination or poverty; the freedom to develop and use their gifts as God intends them to. ♦

Tribute to the men in my life of ministry

by Kathleen Leadley

Reverend Kathleen Leadley is a former church planter in St. Catharines, Ontario; and is serving presently as senior pastor of Ransom Creek Community Church, a Brethren in Christ church in Clarence Center, New York. She resides in St. Catharines, Ontario.

The future of women in ministry does not depend on me. In fact, the future of women in ministry will not likely depend on any woman. I believe the future of women in ministry will largely depend on men. This may come as a surprise to many of my female colleagues who have fought so hard to be in ministry, but just like the age-old saying, “behind every good man is a good woman,” I believe

that it may also be true that behind every good woman are a few good men.

My journey as a woman in ministry began innocently enough. After much searching for truth in my young adult years, I became converted to Christianity. The Gospel was the only thing that ever made sense to me, and I knew that I could not pass up this invitation to invite Christ into my life. I thought that was it; there was

nothing more to consider. I had done the decent thing. Of course, I now know that I was only beginning my life-long journey with Jesus Christ.

Passionate spirituality does not just happen. As a matter of fact, it is the result of intentional action steps. Plugging my way through the Bible and noting the sequence of events, coupled with a heartfelt desire to know God through prayer, kick-started my spiritual journey. I became a passionate lover of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I knew I had to fully serve him. However, what does a stay-at-home wife and mom of three children, five adopted children and several foster children do to serve God? This does not negate service in the home as true service. On the contrary, that is where real ministry takes place. However, I had a vision that included preaching God's word. This is when the first of many men began to encourage me. My husband, Bob, repeatedly told me that God had something for me. "Wait," he said.

And then it happened. Our former pastor (male, I might add) asked if I would like to be the associate pastor of a new church plant he was starting. As I look back, this was not all that surprising since I was in seminary, except I thought seminary would only prepare me to teach a women's Bible study or even an adult Sunday school class. It never occurred to me to pursue pastoral ministry; I had never seen a woman in the pulpit. How could I aspire to something that I never thought possible? The next male to encourage me was my church's bishop. He had been informed of this development and made an appointment for me to meet with him. He endorsed my calling and set me on the path of credentialing with the Brethren in Christ. Eventually I was ordained to Christian ministry. Over the course of time, he was the first of five male bishops to give his full support to my pastoral ministry.

Within a few years, the senior pastor left and I filled this position at the invitation of another bishop. I was not sure how a woman senior pastor in an evangelical church would succeed, but again, it was the men in my ministry life who made it possible. While I had been told that no male pastor would ever work with a woman senior pastor, three men in ministry proved them wrong.

My husband is an ordained minister working in administration for the denomination. He was actively involved in the work of the church but always in a supportive role. He did not want to appear as the pastor and supplant my authority. He was on the church board as treasurer and filled in where needed, including nursery duty. I was sure God had a sense of humor to have him in the nursery while I was expounding God's word from the pulpit.

The second and third pastors were able and gifted Bible college graduates. Both were married with children and, in succession, each was my able associate. They had no problem with women in pastoral leadership and gave credibility to the "woman thing," as I like to call it. They readily accepted my leadership and served capably in ministry. We learned how to work together as a team, laying aside the gender issue.

After ten years as a church planter, I now pastor a congregation that is one hundred

I was sure God had a sense of humor to have my husband in the nursery while I was expounding God's word from the pulpit.



While I cannot discount the support of my women friends in ministry, I owe a debt of gratitude to the men who have made a way for me.

and seventy-seven years old. Steeped in evangelical tradition, it is the most unusual church to call a woman to its' pulpit. Again, at the suggestion of still another male bishop, the church embraced me as their pastor. I am now convinced that it was not a one-time circumstance to be involved in pastoral ministry as a woman; there is a pattern. While I cannot discount the support of my women friends in ministry, I owe a debt of gratitude to the men

who have made a way for me. It is to them that I owe this tribute. The Brethren in Christ have been slow to embrace women in all positions of church leadership, but I believe the future of women in ministry in my denomination lies in confident men giving gifted women opportunities to serve God. After all, men and women have been made to compliment one another and I see no reason why this should not include pastoral ministry. ♦

Table of surprise

by Addie Banks

Addie Banks shares pastoral leadership at King of Glory Tabernacle, a Mennonite congregation in Bronx, New York. She is currently the director of Groundswell, a Community Resource Center that focuses on peacemaking and economic justice. She is a Christian educator that has conducted numerous seminars and workshops in the area of prayer, peacemaking and women's issues. This text is drawn from a sermon that Addie delivered at the Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) Assembly that was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 2003.

Responding to God's Call

SERMON TEXT: II KINGS 6: 8-23

Good morning my brothers and sisters. I'm really delighted to be gathered together with you at this wonderful table that God has set before us. We've seen some very powerful illustrations that almost make it look simple to come to the table together, but the fact that we are here together says that it can be done. The fact that the Mennonite Church has come together as one body says that God is indeed doing it; God is indeed bringing his people together around the table.

I want to encourage you in the Lord because I believe the Mennonite church is hearing from God. This is why I am still here; I believe that we have a message. I believe that in these perilous times, our witness is vital. And so, I want to encourage you to look around and behold the table of God. Look at what God is doing. God is preparing a table before us. The surprise for us is that many of us who named the name of Jesus don't hold that the peace of Christ will really bring people together, but we need to believe that message.

I want to take a look back at Elisha, and I think Elisha is a very powerful symbol for us in the Mennonite church. As the prophet, he is the word of God coming to a people. Elisha comes with the mantle of Elijah.

I'm looking at this from the perspective of the Mennonite church coming together; we came out of something into something

else. The powerful thing about Elisha's ministry, although he asked for the same ministry that Elijah had, was that he was given a ministry that related him to the political powers. This is a leap for Mennonites because we've been apolitical, but I want you to consider the story—what do you think would have happened if when the President of the United States said to us daily that he prayed to God, he would have read this chapter of Second Kings? What would his response to the passage have been?

This is a stretch, it is a leap. It is a leap for us because even as I look out among you this morning, I think there should be a little more color. I think we should look a little different than we do. I know we're going to get there; I know we're moving there because we're open to it. We have said, "You'all come on to the table." As we've said that, we've put ourselves in a vulnerable position, and we've made ourselves available to God. Coming from my experience in New York City, my brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that it is a struggle. The diversity that we seek, and the unity that we seek, is going to require a lot of us. We're going to have to go out on a limb like the prophet did. He made himself vulnerable and he trusted in the Lord. The powers that be were seeking his life. They wanted to kill him and even though we're so comfortable sometimes in our places that God has provided for us, we don't even realize that our lives are in danger as well. They are seeking the very life of the gospel. The powers that be are seeking to snuff out the message of peace. We are witnesses, though, that this will

not happen because God has said, "Come to the table." The surprise here is that we are not only led to the table but we are required to lead others to the table.

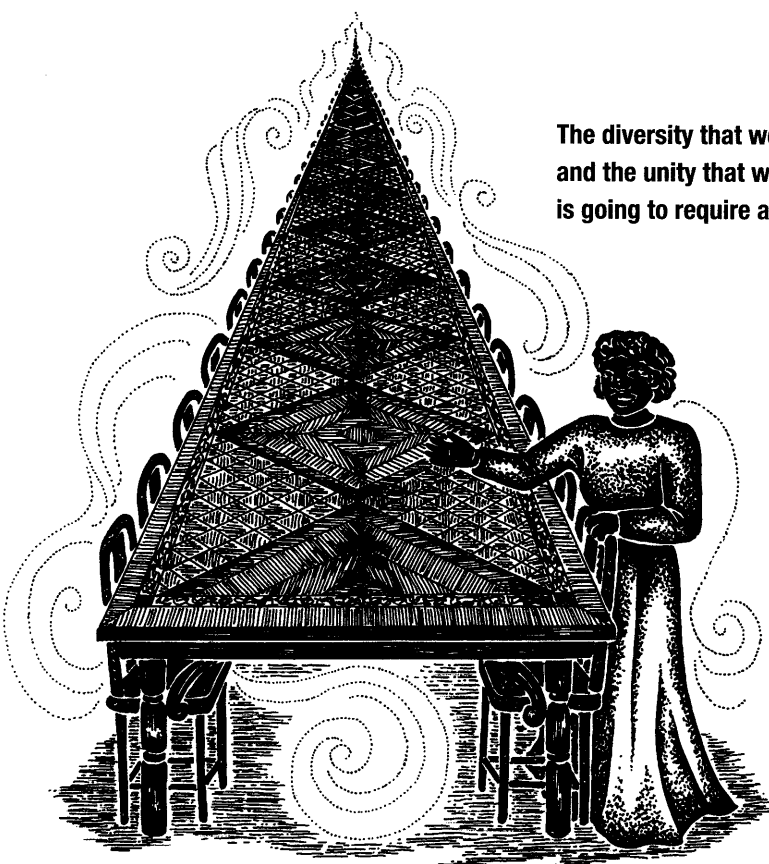
Now, if you look at Scripture, I'm challenged and I'm a bit fearful about it because Elisha is a man who has been pursued. But he lays himself open before God and is transformed. I use transformation because I believe that the table is a place where transformed elements come together and become food, soul food. That is my tradition. The soul food is the fruit of God. That is what begins to happen at the table. When Elisha comes to us, he is a man transformed in the call. A few chapters earlier, Elisha is siccing bears on 40 youth. This is what he does with his power. He is intimidated, he is mocked, he loses it and he exercises power and authority from on high in a malicious way. In some of the texts they have tried to change it and make it look better. But the bottom line is that Elisha was violent towards kids. Today we would have him up for child abuse charges.

So my brothers and sisters, we're looking at Elisha in this story after he comes to the table himself. We're looking at Elisha having been transformed, and that is the call for us this morning. The surprise is that the table is prepared before us. The words have changed. We said, "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Now, it is, "We prepare a table for our enemies in the presence of our God."

It's challenging. It's tough. It means that in the next couple of years, we've got to look a little more colorful. It means that we're going to have to start coming to the city. It means that we're going to have to start building bridges. Maybe a little less programs and really a little bit more of coming around the table together. It means that we're going to have to really start sharing resources. It means the abundance that God has given us; he wants it to be thrown out lavishly so that people can come to the table. He is calling us to call our adversaries to the table. He is saying, I want you to be advocates for your adversaries. That is going to take some changes for us.

He desires that the table be expanded. It's a beautiful table. The table that I'm seeing is a parquet table and it is made of woods from all of God's forests. It's a table that

The diversity that we seek, and the unity that we seek, is going to require a lot of us.



Sermon Text: II Kings 6: 8–23 NRSV

Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Take care not to pass this place, because the Arameans are going down there." The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place so that it was on the alert.

The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, "Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?" Then one of his officers said, "No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber." He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him." He was told, "He is in Dothan." So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed: "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. When the Arameans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, please, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria.

As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men so that they may see." The Lord opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria. When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" He answered, "No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master." So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.

extends beyond where the natural eye can see. It's God's table. And the Mennonite church, I believe, is leading the way. I think it is a historical moment here in Atlanta. And when I heard the title, "You'all come to the table, come to the table you'all." I remember when they said, "You'all get to the back of the bus. You'all stay in the kitchen." And, now, God is saying in Atlanta, this is my table.

I believe that everyone who has been here today is going to have a chance to extend their tables. I believe that each of us is going to be given the opportunity to become advocates for our adversaries; we are going to have the opportunity to lead someone to the table, and, in the process, we're going to be transformed. As co-workers and joint heirs with Jesus, we have the privilege of becoming bread and we have the awesome decision of willing to be broken so that there might be life. That is the surprise at the table . . . that there is life . . . that it is in you . . . that you are bringing it . . . and that God is being made large in the earth.

How do we get people to come to this table? They come because they are provoked, because they are coerced, because

they are oppressed and because nobody else wants to come. There was one thing that we left out at the table of the great banquet (Luke 13:29), and I struggled with this when I received the text, and I'm compelled not to leave it out now. Many are called but few are chosen. The chosen simply has to do with willingness. And many were invited to the banquet, but one person wasn't prepared. They didn't have on the proper attire and rather than being asked to leave, they were thrown out. I really struggle with this text because I like to see God simply as loving and receptive. But having gone through life, and having had to really struggle, I know that God really is requiring more of us. So we're at the table, and we must be transformed. If we are not transformed, we will not move into the light. If there is no light, people will not come. They will not be led. It is our decision whether we remain at the table or not. We can be outside in the darkness or we can remain inside and provide the light. I believe that God is really seeking to use the Mennonite church, and I am deeply encouraged by the vision that God has spoken through the prophets that are among us. So, my brothers and sisters, walk in the light, as He is in the light, and stay at the table. ♦

Wings of hope and weights of reality

by Kristin Reimer

Kristin Reimer is assistant director of Mennonite Conciliation Service and editor of *Conciliation Quarterly*. She moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, four years ago from Waterloo, Ontario, where she is planning to hold a party in 2010. Currently, Kristin attends Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and is an advisor with the youth group.

Three years ago, I decided it was time for a party. I had dreams of everyone who had ever set foot in my life getting together for one day to celebrate love, life and laughter. I was adamant that this would be no typical party peppered with the usual set of suspects; I wanted to celebrate the lives of the family and friends I'm with daily, as well as those I'd lost touch with, and those virtual strangers who enter my world only for a day or two. A week's worth of planning—or even a month's—just wouldn't do to ensure attendance of all the invited guests. I decided nothing short of ten years of planning, dreaming and organizing would suffice. So I set the date and spread the word: June 26, 2010.

I obviously have no problem with forward thinking; there's always something coming up in my life that catches my energy and optimism. My mind and heart seem to be forever one step ahead of my reality. Tomorrow I'll clean out my car and my life will be organized; by next week I'll lose five pounds and my jeans will fit again; by next year (or, at the latest, 2005) a culture of peace and justice will be infused in our lives, homes, churches, countries and world. It's easy to grab onto those wings of hope when I remove all the weights of reality.

I often find myself fluctuating between weightless idealism and heavy despair when I face the world. Neither of these

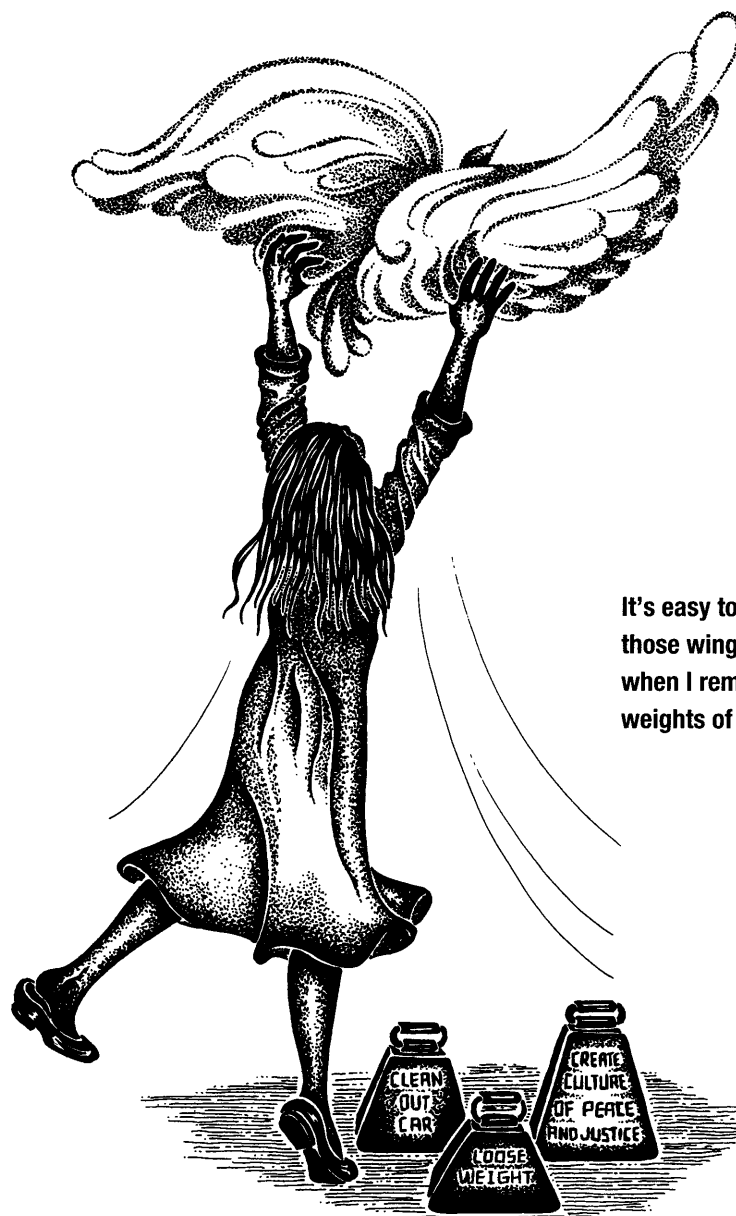
extremes are helpful; neither move me (or my world) in the direction I wish to be heading. And, perhaps more to the point, neither are honest options for living. Unthinking optimism denies the very real challenges and obstacles we must overcome while approaching our goals. On the other hand, deadening despair leaves no energy to continue the journey. Somehow I must learn to pause more often in that middle ground—in the space where real barriers are acknowledged but not given the power to sap me of my drive and hope. It's a place where future dreams are joined with past learnings and present realities to make them that much stronger. It's a place that pulses with integrity. And it's a spot that I rarely visit for any substantial time.

I'm writing this article on the return flight from the Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) Assembly Atlanta 2003. Obviously, much of the happenings from there are fresh on my mind. The theme was "God's Table, Y'All Come," and it was a time of celebration since it was the first convention of the newly united MC USA. There were many shining moments during the week as we looked at where we are heading as a church, and acknowledged how far we've come. Yet, despite the obvious steps forward, something rang a little hollow for me in the self-congratulatory speeches and comments. We are not a table where all are welcome with open arms, or even always appropriate arms. We are a church and a people struggling with racist, sexist and exclusionary policies and practices. This does not translate, however, into us being lost or evil; it simply means we're human. It means that, in order to walk with integrity, we need to fully acknowledge our human shortcomings. Yet, our self-defense mechanisms kick in and make it much easier to celebrate our accomplishments than face this struggle head on, admitting the complexities and pain and exhaustion of the struggle. I don't wish to imply that such convicting words were entirely absent at the convention. In fact, for me they were the most moving and, ironically, encouraging of everything I heard that week. I only wonder how much more powerful the week could have been if that integrity had been infused in all our talk and walk at the convention. Only then can the church (or should the church)

begin to take real steps forward. Only when we honestly announce the names of those now absent from God's table and wrestle with the whys of their absence (rather than merely give them lip service) can we begin to fill the vacant chairs around the table.

There's no doubt in my mind that we, as the Mennonite church, are taking steps forward in our journey. The church is full of God's leading and of faithful listeners, planners and doers. And there's a huge place for joy and celebration in that journey; I'm a definite joy advocate. We need to be careful, however, that the joy of where we're heading doesn't drown out the pain of where we've been and the confusion of where we now stand, or that joy will never be realized in its fullness. ♦

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It's easy to grab onto those wings of hope when I remove all the weights of reality.

Building on past generations, and striving for new opportunities

by Maricela Bejar Chávez

Maricela Bejar Chávez is a member of Iglesia El Buen Pastor, a Spanish speaking Mennonite Brethren congregation in Orange Cove, California. She works with Mennonite Central Committee as the West Coast MCC Service Program Administrator.

What is my vision for women in the coming years? My vision for the coming decades is for women to have a strong sense of identity, to achieve academic success, and to achieve economic freedom. My focus in this article will be particularly on women of color, and, more specifically, Latina women; the category in which I belong, and the one in which I move and live among.

The generation of Latina women I was raised by are by nature hard working and possess a persevering spirit; they are by nature care-givers and caretakers. They are

women who by day work long hours in a packing shed or work picking oranges, grapes, tomatoes or whatever crop is in season; and by night cook meals, clean house, wash clothes, and above all are mothers, wives, sisters, friends and daughters. This generation of women are survivors, their strength and perseverance help them find joy in everyday life. I often wonder what more could these women have achieved if they could have had the opportunity of a formal education?

I envision that the younger generation of Latina women will salvage from these women the ethic of hard work and perse-



verance, and that they will strive to make use of the educational opportunities that come their way. I envision women of color investing in their future. I envision women of color achieving academic success. My hope is that young women of color will find within themselves the desire to further their education, and that they will find the support for this from their parents, their peer group, their immediate surroundings and also from the educational system. I envision that they will not limit their possibilities to a Bachelors degree but will strive for a Masters degree, and why not for a Doctorate too?

I envision that this, in turn, will open doors for women to occupy leadership positions; positions that up to now have been mainly limited to men, such as pastorships, politics, and executive positions. I envision them moving from running a kitchen and a household to running a church, a business or a nation.

This is not to say that formal education is the only way to success or that it is the equivalent of success because I have met

many women who have never set foot in a formal educational setting, but nonetheless, they are very wise and intelligent women who have achieved much. However, formal education does open more doors and gives more options. It also brings more economic freedom.

I also envision that their academic success will gain the respect and support of men. I hope that future generations of men will be open and humble enough to appreciate, support and respect the contribution women make (and have always made) in every area of life: home, church and work life.

And, finally, my vision for future generations of women of color is that with their education and their economic freedom, they will also have the freedom to be themselves—to have a strong sense of identity, of pride of who they are and where they have come from. They will have pride in their gender, their ethnicity, their heritage, their culture, their place in life, and—most importantly—pride in who God has created them to be. ♦

I envision that the younger generation of women will salvage from these women the ethic of hard work and perseverance, and that they will strive to make use of the educational opportunities that come their way.

BOOK REVIEW

Parker J. Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). 109 pages.

When I was growing up, I used to spend hours teaching a room full of children that only I could see. My nine-patch quilt on the double bed in my room served as the desks, each nine-patch representing one student. In eighth grade, I was given an assignment to give a presentation and create a poster representing what I wanted to be when I grew up. My poster was a chalkboard in the shape of an apple . . . I had teaching in my blood.

Today, as I sit here in my office in the Peace and Justice Department with my B.A. in International Business, I wonder

when that dream died. I wonder what may have caused me to actually utter recently that I don't know what I want to do with my life, but I know for a fact that I do not want to be a teacher. Why the complete shift in my soul? Was it one event or many?

And then my friend gave me Parker Palmer's book, *Let Your Life Speak*. In the book, Palmer describes his own childhood passion of aviation. He stated that as a high school senior he wanted to be a naval aviator (p. 13). Yet, through the years, he discovered that his passion for aviation in his childhood did not stem from the desire to fly the planes, but rather the desire to write about how the planes operate. He recalls spending hours

writing books on aviation and how the planes function (p. 14).

Palmer encourages us to listen to the passions of our childhood while at the same time determining where these passions come from. He encourages the reader to “listen to life,” learn what excited us about our childhood adventures and see if we are following our true passion.

Let Your Life Speak is a small book packed with content. Five of the six chapters first appeared as essays or speeches. In this small space, Palmer outlines a new way of looking at life: from within. He asserts that we must know our deepest soul before we can determine the vocations for our lives. Parker acknowledges that we are all born with gifts, but we must determine what those are. They can not be determined by the people who surround us. “We arrive in this world with birthright gifts—then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them” (p. 12).

One of the most meaningful parts of the book for me came when Palmer described a simple conversation he had with an older Quaker woman named Ruth. In it, he questioned the typical Quaker response of “Have faith, a way will open.” What if a way never opens? Ruth responded that she had been a Quaker for over sixty years and had never seen a way open. However, she says, “But a lot of way has closed behind me, and that’s had the same guiding effect” (p. 38). I have often felt as though I often don’t see ways being

opened; yet, looking back, I know that ways have indeed closed to help me determine the paths that I have taken.

Palmer also takes a significant amount of time in the book to lay out a period of intense depression he had. He speaks about how the time of depression is a time of disconnection. “Depression is the ultimate state of disconnection, not only between people, and between mind and heart, but between one’s self-image and public mask . . . Disconnection may be hell, but it is better than false connections” (p. 62). However, this time of depression is also the time when we determine who we really are, when we go into the darkest corners of our souls and determine what is inside of us. What a relief it is to know that these times of despair can actually lead to a time of greater health!

So, why *did* I spend so many hours as a child turning my bedroom into a classroom? What was the hidden passion in my play? Have I hidden it so much during the course of my life that I can never return to that passion? Or has the passion surfaced in other ways? Am I doing what I always wanted to do as a child by helping others educate adults; is this my nine-patch quilt coming to life again?

This book is a reflection piece. It is a book that must be read more than once to truly be digested. As I am struggling to determine where life’s journey is taking me, and what changes are soon to come, I am encouraged that I am not alone in this struggle. I have been given some great tools to help me in this journey, and this is a great one to add to the list. ♦

Women in church leadership

Ana Karim began serving as pastor of Richmond Mennonite Fellowship in Richmond, Virginia, on September 21, 2003.

Ruth Bruinooge is youth pastor at Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, as of September 2003.

Monica Bock and Rachel Siemens are interim youth pastors at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Ruth Johnston began serving as intentional interim pastor in July 2003 at Agape Fellowship in London, Ontario.

To the Editor:

GREETINGS from the Advisory Group on Nepali Women!

I would like to say thank you very much for the *Women's Concern Report*, which we receive regularly. All articles and reports are very useful for us. Whenever I read the Report, I feel very encouraged, but sometimes I feel very sad also when I read a tragedy type of story. However, one thing is true, and that is that God has the power to change every individual's life towards the happy while moving away from tragedy. I share success stories from the Report with my friends and family members. They also like it very much. We appreciate your commitment and hard work.

Amrita Karthak
United Mission to Nepal
Kathmandu, Nepal



Editor's note: The goal of this column is to offer a place for our readers to respond to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in *Report*. Although we try to print all letters, they may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, but writers may request to have their names withheld.

African women theologians gather. At the Mennonite World Conference held in Zimbabwe in August, African women theologians held workshops that focused on leadership opportunities and women centered Bible studies. Women theologians in Africa may not be encouraged into leadership positions, but they are not discouraged. Béatrice Kadi Hayalume, who was ordained on August 24 after years of service as a teacher of religion, is convinced that women are called to serve the church in many areas. "The Holy Spirit moves where it will. The same Spirit that moves men, moves women. Not all women want to be pastors, only those with a vocation for it." In other workshops, women from South Africa shared how they study the Bible from women's perspective. These women also shared how they work within the community, trying to make a difference for street children, AIDS patients, and abused women and children. The Bible study group has published 11 booklets on topics like women in the Old and the New Testament, sexual issues, aging, separation and divorce, and singleness.

Lydia Penner, "Confident African Women Theologians Eager to Serve Church," Mennonite World Conference, September 5, 2003.

Nigerian stoning sentence overturned. On September 25th, an Islamic appeals court overturned the conviction of 32-year-old Amina Lawal. She had been convicted of adultery in March 2002 following the birth of her daughter two years after she had divorced her husband, and her punishment was to be death by stoning. In their ruling, the judge's panel said she was not caught in the act of adultery and she was not given "ample opportunity to defend herself." Following her original conviction, there was significant national and international pressure to overturn her sentence. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and other world leaders called for the sentence to be overturned. International rights groups spoke out against the sentence and sponsored petitions to overturn the sentence. Brazil even offered Amina asylum. This case is inspiring for all who fight for women's rights; joining together internationally can have positive results. "*Nigerian stoning sentence overturned*," *MSNBC, September 25, 2003.*





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NEWS & VERBS

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2004

Gifts of the Red Tent:
Women Creating

◆
MARCH-APRIL 2004

Women and immigration

◆
MAY-JUNE 2004

Men's changing roles

MCC Abuse Web site. On October 18, Voices for Non-Violence, a program of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba, hosted a Web launch of the new MCC domestic violence and sexual abuse site. The Web launch featured a concert by House of Doc and Monica Schroeder. The Web site is the work of the MCC Canada and MCC United States Women's Concerns programs. Kathryn Mitchell Loewen, the former Women's Network Coordinator for MCC Canada, is coordinating the project. Please visit www.mcc.org/abuse to access resources, educational tools, and information about domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Women in Ministry Resource Room.

The Brethren in Christ (BIC) Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership has recently opened the Women in Ministry Resource Room in the Hoffman Building (3rd floor, room 316) at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania. The Resource room will serve as the home-base for the BIC Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership, and it will house their records. It will also be the home-base for the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy organization. Educational and resource materials are also available. The Resource room will be open 20 hours a week. The hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 1:30 to 6 P.M.; and Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30 to 11:30 A.M. If you would like more information or would like to visit during other hours, please contact Janet Peifer at 717-259-5404 or 717-697-4666 x417. ◆